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SIPDIS

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TAGS: PHUM KOCI KWMN TC

SUBJECT: FGM ON THE DECLINE IN UAE

1. SUMMARY: THE TRADITIONAL PRACTICE OF FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION (FGM) HAS ALMOST DISAPPEARED AMONG UAE NATIONALS DUE TO THE SPREAD OF EDUCATION, GREATER AWARENESS OF THE HEALTH RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH FGM, AND GOVERNMENT INSTRUCTIONS TO HOSPITALS AND CLINICS PROHIBITING THE PRACTICE, ACCORDING TO HEALTH CARE AND WOMEN'S ADVOCATES. CASES OF FGM PERSIST, MOSTLY AMONG SOMALI, OMANI, AND SUDANESE EXPATRIATES, WHOSE YOUNG DAUGHTERS UNDERGO THE PROCEDURE, MOSTLY IN RURAL AREAS. THE TRADITIONAL PRACTITIONERS OPERATE IN PRIVATE CLINICS AND IN HOMES. THESE POPULATIONS ARE LIKELY TO CONTINUE SEEKING THE PROCEDURE IN THE UAE AS LONG AS THE UAE DOES NOT HAVE A LAW FORBIDDING FGM OR PUNISHING THE TRADITIONAL PRACTITIONERS. END SUMMARY.

2. THE PRACTICE OF FGM IS BECOMING LESS COMMON IN THE UAE, ALTHOUGH THERE IS NO LAW ON THE BOOKS SPECIFICALLY PROHIBITING IT. FGM'S DECLINE IS A RESULT OF THE SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN, ACCORDING TO HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS AND WOMEN'S ADVOCATES. WHEN FGM WAS AN ACCEPTABLE TRADITIONAL PRACTICE IN THE UAE, NO ONE SOUGHT TO PUNISH THOSE WHO PERFORMED IT. EIGHT YEARS AGO, A SUDANESE FEMALE GYNECOLOGIST, DR. SAMIRA AL MANDILI, WAS DEPORTED BECAUSE SHE WAS PERFORMING FGM AND ABORTIONS IN ABU DHABI. THERE IS STILL NO EFFORT TO CRIMINALIZE FGM IN THE UAE. (NOTE: THE UAE IS SIGNATORY TO INTERNATIONAL CONVENTIONS THAT ADDRESS FGM, SUCH AS THE INTERNATIONAL COVENANT ON CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS, THE CONVENTIONS ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD, AND THE CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN.)

3. THE OFFICE OF FOREIGN RELATIONS AT THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH EXPLAINED TO POLITICAL ASSISTANT THAT FGM IS PROHIBITED IN THE UAE, EXCEPT WHEN IT IS NECESSARY TO REPAIR A DEFORMITY, AND THAT FGM IS AN UNHEALTHY PRACTICE. THE HEALTH MINISTRY HAS INSTRUCTED GOVERNMENT HOSPITALS AND PRIVATE CLINICS FOR AT LEAST THE LAST DECADE NOT TO PERFORM THE PROCEDURE. HOWEVER, HOSPITALS STILL RECEIVE REQUESTS, ESPECIALLY FROM OMANI, SOMALI, AND SUDANESE EXPATRIATES, A FEMALE GOVERNMENT PEDIATRICIAN TOLD THE EMBASSY'S POLITICAL ASSISTANT. SOME PRIVATE CLINICS IN THE NORTHERN EMIRATES CONTINUE TO PERFORM FGM DESPITE STRICT MINISTRY OF HEALTH INSTRUCTIONS FORBIDDING THIS. FGM IS ALSO PRACTICED IN RURAL AREAS BY ELDERLY WOMEN OR MIDWIVES KNOWN TO THE SUDANESE, OMANIS, OR SOMALIS, SOURCES IN THE SUDANESE COMMUNITY AND THE HEALTH CARE SECTOR SAY.

4. THE HEAD OF THE HEALTH COMMITTEE AT THE GENERAL WOMEN'S UNION, A GOVERNMENT-SPONSORED WOMEN'S ORGANIZATION, ASSURED US THAT FGM IS NO LONGER A CONCERN FOR UAE NATIONALS BECAUSE OF GREATER AWARENESS ABOUT THE HEALTH RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH FGM. "IF IT WERE A CONCERN, THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH WOULD HAVE APPROACHED US FOR ASSISTANCE TO HOLD AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS ON SUCH AN ISSUE," THE HEAD OF THE HEALTH COMMITTEE SAID. OUR CONTACTS AT THE UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM IN THE UAE AND AT UNICEF'S REGIONAL OFFICE IN OMAN CONFIRMED THAT FGM IS NOT ON THEIR AGENDA, AND THEY HAVE NOT BEEN ASKED BY THE WHO REPRESENTATIVE'S OFFICE IN CAIRO TO PURSUE THIS ISSUE OR COLLECT DATA. (NOTE: WE HAVE REQUESTED FROM THE HEALTH MINISTRY CURRENT AND HISTORICAL STATISTICS ON CASES ADMITTED TO THE COUNTRY'S HOSPITALS AND CLINICS AS A CONSEQUENCE OF FGM, BUT HAVE NOT RECEIVED ANY RESPONSE TO DATE.)

5. UAE UNIVERSITY POLITICAL SCIENCE PROFESSOR, DR. FATEMA AL SAYEGH, SAID THAT FGM TYPES I, II OR IV (AS PER WHO DEFINITIONS) WERE PERFORMED WIDELY ON UAE NATIONALS IN THE 70'S AND 80'S, BUT THE PRACTICE DECREASED CONSIDERABLY AMONG THEM AS THEY BECAME BETTER EDUCATED AND MORE AWARE OF FGM'S LONG-TERM PSYCHOLOGICAL, EMOTIONAL, AND PHYSICAL IMPLICATIONS. THE VAST MAJORITY OF YOUNG UAE WOMEN ARE NOT VICTIMS OF ANY TYPE OF FGM, AL SAYEGH AND WOMEN'S ADVOCATES SAID.

6. FGM (TYPE III OR "PHARAONIC") IS STILL DEEPLY ROOTED IN THE CULTURAL PRACTICES OF MANY EXPATRIATE NATIONALITIES RESIDING IN THE UAE, SUCH AS THE SUDANESE, OMANIS, AND SOMALIS. SOME SUDANESE PREFER TO TAKE THEIR DAUGHTERS TO SUDAN TO PERFORM FGM BECAUSE IT IS USUALLY ASSOCIATED WITH FAMILY RITUALS. FGM IS STILL PREVALENT IN RURAL AREAS OF THE UAE AND IS BEING PERFORMED AT HOMES OR PRIVATE CLINICS IN REMOTE AREAS, WHICH ARE FAR FROM MEDICAL MONITORING, AND WHERE THE MAJORITY OF LOW-SKILLED SUDANESE RESIDE, ACCORDING TO FIRST-HAND INFORMATION FROM AN EMBASSY SUDANESE LES.

7. ALL OF OUR CONTACTS AGREED THAT FGM, WHEN PRACTICED, IS NOT A RELIGIOUS REQUIREMENT, ALTHOUGH THERE ARE TWO HADITHS (SAYINGS BY PROPHET MOHAMMED) THAT DESCRIBE THE FIRST TYPE OF FGM AS PERMISSIBLE BUT NOT OBLIGATORY.

18. COMMENT: WHILE WE HAVE ANECDOTAL EVIDENCE THAT ALL FORMS OF FGM ARE BEING PRACTICED IN THE UAE, THE NUMBER OF VICTIMS HAS DECLINED SIGNIFICANTLY WITH THE SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN. WE WILL FOLLOW UP WITH THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH ON ANY DATA, AND WE WILL NOTE OUR FINDINGS ABOUT FGM IN THE NEXT ANNUAL HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT. END COMMENT.

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